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What’s new online: Patient Resources

Watch the latest videos at mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn/patient-resources

- Talking to kids about cancer
Helpful age-appropriate information is available at StartheTalk.ca for ideas and support.
(see p. 6 for more)

- Preserving fertility
Learn why cancer patients need to consider preserving their fertility before starting treatments.
(see p. 6 for more)

- Women and breast cancer
Watch videos and hear first-hand about the experiences of other women on their cancer journey.

- Patient-reported symptoms
Symptom screening is important. Learn how your health care team uses it to support you.
We are proud to report that our first public Scorecard is now accessible online. The three partner hospitals of the RCN (the McGill University Health Centre, the Jewish General Hospital, and St. Mary’s Hospital Center) strive to provide cancer patients with the highest quality of care. The Scorecard is one of the initiatives we have in place to create harmonized cancer care in the McGill-affiliated hospitals.

1. How do we know we are providing world-class care?
   In order to evaluate the care we provide, we set a target for ourselves. Quality indicators are measured and results compared to the leading standards in Canada and internationally. This first Scorecard looks at seven indicators that can impact patient outcomes.

2. What is an indicator?
   An indicator is a measure of performance: it can be the time between diagnosis and surgery for a specific cancer, the adherence to practice standards, or the percent of patients who report excellent levels of care.
   
   We looked for indicators that were meaningful and important to patients, selected from existing indicators collected by each partner hospital – some of which are required by the Ministry of Health.

3. Why measure indicators of quality?
   The indicators selected for measurement were chosen to help look for areas for improvement. We need the information to see where the issues are, and where processes can be improved.

4. Why publish a Scorecard?
   Transparency is important for patients and healthcare providers. Studies show that when measures of performance are publically reported, management and clinical staff are motivated to improve or maintain high levels of performance. By regularly reporting a set of network-wide quality indicators on the RCN website, we hope to act as a catalyst for positive change.

5. So how are we doing?
   We are extremely proud that patients in the 3 RCN hospitals give high ratings for the overall quality of their care. Over 97% of respondents rate the overall quality of services as "excellent", "very good" or "good"!
   
   Of the seven indicators measured, the RCN partners ranked above provincial targets in 3 of them. The other four indicators were measured to get more precise feedback to help orient improvement initiatives.
   
   We will be reporting on new indicators annually. So stay tuned!
   
   And you can see all the details of our first seven indicators at mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn/scorecard.
CPAC annual conference

The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC) held its first annual conference in April, titled “Innovative Approaches to Optimal Cancer Care in Canada.” CPAC is a federally funded organization that works with governments, cancer agencies and national health organizations to improve cancer control across the country.

“The CPAC conference was an excellent opportunity to network with colleagues across Canada, discuss common challenges in the delivery of care and identify possible solutions,” explains RCN clinical lead, Dr. Wilson Miller. “It was an opportunity to showcase the RCN’s efforts through poster and oral presentations by RCN staff and two medical residents. For these future leaders especially, the conference brought to light another aspect of medicine – quality management and innovative practices – which is not typically taught in medical school.”

Among the national leaders invited to present were two of the RCN’s own Executive Committee members: Dr. Armen Aprikian, chief of oncology at the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) discussed the Quebec experience implementing recommendations to improve quality of care for bladder cancer. And Dr. Ari Meguerditchian, a surgical oncologist at the MUHC took part in a panel discussion examining the top things that could be done to immediately improve cancer care in Canada, including expanding diagnostic assessment programs; sharing existing data more effectively; implementing patient portals extensively; and integrating palliative care earlier.

The RCN also had 5 scientific posters presented during open sessions for discussion with other conference-goers. Topics ranged from the successes and challenges of coordinating patient access to clinical trials across the partner hospitals to redeveloping the McGill adolescent and young adult model of care to enhance quality of life, as well as evaluating patient satisfaction survey results to define new improvement initiatives.

Two RCN Disease Site Groups presented posters on recent findings in their teams. The Head & Neck group evaluated the multidisciplinary approach to treatment planning for head & neck cancer patients, while the Gastrointestinal group looked at improving adherence to recommended treatment guidelines for stage III colon cancer patients.

“The conference allowed the RCN to help shape discussions on important challenges that should be prioritized across Canada,” explained Dr. Miller. We were there

RCN project manager Gligorka Raskovic (left) and Adolescent Young Adult (AYA) coordinator Rebecca Fox presented a poster on redeveloping AYA care in the McGill hospitals

RCN executive member Dr. Armen Aprikian discussed the Quebec experience improving quality of care for bladder cancer.

Dr. Mitali Ruths presented a poster on the RCN’s efforts to coordinate access to clinical trials across the partner hospitals.

We were there

Medical resident Arielle Elkrief presented a poster on the RCN’s efforts to improve adherence to guidelines for stage III colon cancer.

"The conference allowed the RCN to help shape discussions on important challenges that should be prioritized across Canada," explained Dr. Miller.

"The conference allowed the RCN to help shape discussions on important challenges that should be prioritized across Canada in the next few years," concluded Dr. Miller, "such as how to improve cancer care for patients through system-level change, and how to accelerate the adoption of the most promising advances in cancer care today to benefit patients."
Inspiring other cancer centres
THE SECOND-LARGEST CANCER HOSPITAL IN LATIN AMERICA LOOKS TO THE RCN FOR BEST PRACTICES

Last fall, the Rossy Cancer Network welcomed a delegation from Barretos Cancer Hospital (BCH) in Brazil. Looking to share knowledge and find new ways of working, directors from BCH toured leading cancer hospitals in the US and Canada. BCH is the second largest cancer treatment hospital in South America, seeing an impressive 6000 patients daily, and recently added a medical school to the centre.

The work being done at the RCN gave them several avenues to consider. “The Rossy Cancer Network program to improve quality across the McGill teaching hospitals is very important; improving quality is also one of our concerns. The RCN partner hospitals have many clinical trials in place to advance new knowledge, and this is one of the areas we are looking to expand,” said Dr. Mauad, the Director of BCH. He was joined on this visit by the executive director of its Teaching and Research Institute, Dr. Fregnani, and the Dean of the new BCH School of Medicine, Dr. Serrano.

Their tour of McGill and its teaching hospitals included meeting with several members of the RCN Executive Committee, including Dr. Eduardo Franco, the chair of the department of Oncology at McGill University, Dr. Wilson Miller, associate director for Clinical Research of the Lady Davis Institute, Dr. Armen Aprikian, head of the Cancer Care Mission at the McGill University Health Centre and Dr. Gerald Batist, director of the Segal Cancer Centre at the Jewish General Hospital.

“I am very happy that the Memorandum of Understanding we signed with the Barretos Cancer Hospital in Brazil has led to excellent collaborative leads in cancer research and education,” explained Dr. Franco. “The Rossy Cancer Network is an excellent platform to enable close cooperation with our colleagues in Barretos. Our challenges and opportunities may be somewhat different but we uphold the same goals and values in advancing the quality of cancer care and patient satisfaction in our respective communities.”

The BCH team also felt that they could contribute best practices from their successful cancer screening program. “The McGill network is responsible for a large portion of Quebec, up to the Arctic. At BCH, we also have a very large country with people in rural areas who don’t have access to specialized health care. We have developed many programs to help and this is experience that we can share.”

"The RCN hospitals have many clinical trials to advance new knowledge. This is an area we are also looking to improve," said Dr. Mauad
This year, the RCN’s Gyencological Oncology Disease Site Team held its annual symposium on a crucial and often overlooked topic. The symposium examined how stress and the mind-body connection impacts the ability of health care providers to do their jobs under difficult circumstances, as well as how it can allow them to empower their patients throughout the most difficult moments of their cancer journey and help improve outcomes.

The guest speaker was Dr. Robert Rutledge, a practising oncologist and associate professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax with expertise in psychosocial oncology, neuroscience applied to patient outcomes, and professional caregiver health. Dr. Rutledge’s Healing and Cancer Foundation (healingandcancer.ca) freely offers educational videos, documentaries, and web-casting seminars which feature an integrated approach for those with a cancer diagnosis.

“Self care is extremely important for health providers and is often forgotten. There is such a high risk of burnout because health providers are focused on giving to patients and forget to take care of themselves. But there is really no separation between self care and giving the best care to person in front of you,” explained Dr. Rutledge.

The interactive workshop had the health care team practice reframing their negative thoughts, and using stress-reduction techniques such meditation, visualization and qi gong. “If there is one thing I would want health providers to come away with it’s that we can reframe our stress. Instead of trying to get rid of stress, we can use our stress reaction to take the time to focus, and reframe the stressful event into one where we are doing something important.”

Part of the workshop was spent reviewing evidence-based alternative therapies and supplements that have been shown to be beneficial to support cancer patients. Topics also included the way stress and resilience can impact a patient’s adherence to treatment, and the way that health care providers can support patients simply by the way they listen and respond to them.

One of the participants, Dr. Kris Jardon, a surgical oncologist at the McGill University Health Centre, felt that the workshop was important not only for the stress reduction techniques and self-care that were highlighted, but also as a means of creating more unity and solidarity among multidisciplinary health care professionals who work at separate hospitals in the RCN.

“When we meet to discuss cases, we respond to the problem and questions quickly and move on. Things stay professional and medical. The workshop was a welcome opportunity to bring a more compassionate listening to the whole team – the pivot and chemotherapy nurses, the surgical team, the secretaries, the physicians. The workshop brought more humanity to our very professional context,” explained Jardon.

“It was also a reminder that if we want to have a compassionate listening of others, we also need to bring this to ourselves as well. We need to use the tools such as meditation, breathing, body awareness, in order to have that awareness to offer others through our work.”

Workshop participants included physicians, nurses and allied health professionals from the RCN’s Gyencological Oncology Disease Site Team.
TWO RCN QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES PROJECTS HELP CONNECT PATIENTS WITH CRUCIAL RESOURCES

Cancer patients and their loved ones face many difficult moments – from planning for their future, to telling young children about their diagnosis. A pair of projects funded by the RCN’s Quality Improvement Initiatives (QI²) Fund aims to improve access to resources to support cancer patients in two key ways: by increasing awareness of fertility preservation for male cancer patients before they begin treatments, and by supporting those who need to discuss this emotional diagnosis with children.

Preserving fertility before cancer treatments
Most boys and men with cancer have no idea that the treatments they receive will very likely impact their fertility. Often when they find out, it’s too late. A team led by Dr. Belén Herrero, PhD, of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) hopes to get the message out to patients and healthcare providers that fertility can be preserved, and it needs to be planned ahead.

“We want to build bridges between oncologists, healthcare professionals and fertility specialists by raising awareness that fertility is an issue to be brought up when the patient first sees the oncologist,” said Dr. Herrero.

Team members from the Reproductive Centre also held a series of education sessions with oncologists and healthcare providers at each partner hospital to get the message out. These led to a 70% change in healthcare providers’ awareness of fertility preservation options.

The multi-pronged project includes developing a standardized referral system to help channel patients from the three RCN partner hospitals – the MUHC, the Jewish General Hospital and St. Mary’s Hospital Center – to the MUHC Reproductive Centre.

In addition, the project team developed videos, posters and brochures to be displayed in hospital waiting rooms and during patient education sessions (available at mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn/patient-resources and mcgillivf.com) which clarify how fertility preservation works. That information will also be available on the MUHC’s radiation oncology patient portal, OPAL.

The project also included a patient survey to find out how much information was previously being offered to male cancer patients about fertility preservation. “Eighty percent of them said no information was given,” explained Dr. Herrero.

She and her team want to establish a three-step protocol for all male cancer patients who have passed puberty, including older men, to improve on this.

First, the patient should be informed of the possibility early in their cancer journey and offered a referral to a fertility specialist if they are interested. Second, they should freeze their sperm before the cancer treatment. And third, once they have overcome the cancer and are ready, they should consult their fertility specialist to assess their fertility, and if necessary how to proceed using their frozen sperm.

FOLLOW UP WITH A FERTILITY SPECIALIST
To watch the video, visit mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn and look for Patient Resources.
Last year, only 6% of newly diagnosed male cancer patients between the ages of 14 and 60 at the 3 RCN hospitals, visited the MUHC Reproductive Centre to preserve their fertility. Patient awareness of the program will be evaluated in January 2018 using the ongoing patient survey.

“We are expecting to have a significant increase in the number of referrals in the first six months after we begin to raise awareness of its importance,” concluded Dr. Herrero. “In the next year, we hope to see an even greater increase.” And given that having children is a major part of many people’s life goals, every cancer patient should have the option to preserve his or her fertility.

**Telling kids about cancer**

Talking to a child or teen about a family member or friend’s cancer diagnosis cancer has to be one of the toughest things a caregiver ever has to face. But not talking about it can be even worse.

“Children pick up cues, they’re aware something is going on but they’re not quite sure what,” said Andréa Maria Laizner, RN, PhD, Assistant Professor at the Ingram School of Nursing at McGill. “The older ones can figure it out but the younger ones can’t, and especially in families where some people know and others don’t, it leads to a lot of anxiety.”

Dr. Laizner is the lead investigator of the Start the Talk project which aims to give healthcare professionals, educators, cancer patients and their families the tools to address cancer with children and teens who are affected by the illness. “We want to empower patients to be able to open up the discussion with their care team and develop some comfort in bringing up the topic with children and teens,” explained Dr. Laizner.

Start the Talk was first developed in 2013 by the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology (CAPO) as a series of online modules. The interactive website uses videos, slides, images and text to convey in simple terms what cancer is, what children understand at different ages, ways to help them cope and tips on how discuss the stages of the disease, including diagnosis, treatment, recurrence and death. There is also a list of other resources.

The current RCN-funded project aims to make the modules accessible to all patients in Canada by developing a French version and updating content from startthetalk.ca to parlonsen.ca.

A survey of 131 ambulatory cancer patients and 88 healthcare providers in April 2016 revealed that “a very small proportion – 4% – of patients and 16% of healthcare professionals were aware of the [existing CAPO] modules,” said Dr. Laizner.

To turn this around, the team has been doing information sessions in cancer clinics, mostly to nursing staff, to raise awareness of this resource and to enable health care providers to introduce the modules to patients as well. In 2016, website visits almost doubled during the period of the information sessions. A follow-up survey will be done in the fall of 2017.
Bringing targeted treatments to more patients

RCN-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS LOOK AT HOW NEW IMAGING TECHNIQUES CAN CREATE MORE PERSONALIZED TREATMENTS

In this issue of RCN Update, we profile two of the five recipients of the RCN’s 2015 Cancer Quality & Innovation (CQI) Research Fund. These projects focus on the way diagnostic imaging can help patients with throat or lung cancer receive more individualized therapies which reduce the burden of cancer and improve outcomes. In 2015, close to $400,000 in CQI Research Grants were awarded to five projects that are investigating new ways to improve cancer care. You can read about the other three 2015 recipients in the Fall 2016 edition of RCN Update.

A tumour texture database for targeted treatment

What if certain cancer patients could be spared invasive and uncomfortable biopsies? What if they could also be spared unnecessary chemo and radiation treatments? Looking at patients with oropharyngeal (throat) cancer, Dr. Jeffrey Chankowsky, associate professor of Diagnostic Radiology at McGill, and his multi-hospital team hope to use hidden data from imaging exams to map tumour texture and eventually determine what kind of tumour a patient has and how best to target treatment.

In the prospective study, 60 patients will be recruited and tested to see if their tumour is negative or positive for human papilloma virus (HPV). “We are trying to establish whether patients with HPV-associated oropharyngeal cancer have a different type of tumour,” says Dr. Chankowsky. Recruitment for the study is still ongoing as this is not a common cancer.

HPV-positive patients tend to have a better prognosis, and the thinking is that identifying them early could lead to more targeted, less toxic treatments. Currently the only way to find out is to perform a biopsy. “That’s an invasive procedure and can involve complications,” says Dr. Chankowsky.

A mathematical analysis using McGill-developed software will be performed to map the textures of both the HPV-positive and -negative tumours using data from different types of scans (MRI, CT and PET) that is otherwise invisible to the naked eye.

Eventually, a tumour texture database will be built that physicians will be able to consult to determine the tumour type and the best treatment for that type.

Dr. Chankowsky says the information from these analyses can be used for much more than HPV status. In the future, he says, we could use it to track how patients progress and then apply that knowledge to other patients with the same type of tumour.

“For example, this patient has texture ABC, so the oncologist will know these are patients that tend to recur faster, and they tend to occur at the tumour site and with the lymph nodes, and that may need more radiation therapy. Versus another patient who is in the category of high responders, who don’t recur very much, so we can use a less toxic approach and give them less chemotherapy.”

“Throat cancer patients who are HPV positive tend to have a better prognosis. Identifying them early could lead to less toxic treatments,” explained Dr. Chankowsky
“It’s basically a more individualized therapy based on the genomic makeup of the actual tumour,” adds Dr. Chankowsky.

**Imaging unmasks lung cancer mutations**
A second RCN-funded study investigates the implications of tumour texture on the way we tackle cancer, in this case non-small cell lung carcinoma (NSCLC), a cancer that is typically detected in late stage and unfortunately has poor survival rates.

“Texture imaging in radiology is one of the new up and coming areas of interest,” explains study lead Dr. Jana Taylor, assistant professor of Diagnostic Radiology at McGill. “It initially started by looking at survival and preliminary results showed that patients whose tumours were more homogeneous in their texture tended to have better outcomes.”

From there, researchers began looking for patterns in different tumour mutations to see if they could differentiate the mutations based solely on imaging and avoid genetic analysis, an expensive and laborious process.

For their study, Dr. Taylor and her team recruited 46 patients from the Jewish General Hospital and McGill University Health Centre with NSCLC. All patients had undergone genetic profiling looking for the EGRF mutation as well as pre-treatment CT and PET scans.

The preliminary results are very encouraging, says Dr. Taylor, with the mathematical analysis of the scans comparing favourably in terms of statistical accuracy to the more laborious genetic analysis of biopsies.

“I think it has a lot of very interesting implications about being able to identify these mutations just based on regular imaging characteristics and can really guide clinicians on the management of these specific tumours.”

According to Dr. Taylor, the potential applications for this kind of imaging-based analysis are far-reaching. In the future, she says, we may be able to use this method to screen at-risk patients for NSCLC in order to catch it sooner. Imaging analysis could also back up biopsies, which are taken from a small sample of a larger tumour and so can miss mutations elsewhere in the tumour.

“With imaging we are finding lots of early tumours,” explains Dr. Taylor. “There is some controversy about whether these should be treated aggressively or with watchful waiting. Texture analysis could help in guiding how aggressively we should treat them.”

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Quality Improvement Initiatives Fund

**Call for proposals – Round 2!**
We are opening up a second wave of QI² projects this fall!

Submit your project before **September 29, 2017**.

Visit [mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn](http://mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn) for all the details
The Quality Improvement Initiatives (QI²) Fund was designed to support operational projects that will make a rapid impact on the delivery of care for cancer patients in the network, by teams who know first-hand what would make the most difference. QI2 Grants include the dedicated time of an RCN project manager and data analyst to make sure teams are supported to successfully implement their initiative. The fund is open to all health professionals directly involved in the provision of cancer care in one of the RCN hospitals.

Congratulations to the spring 2017 recipients!

**Dr. Franck Bladou**, chief of urology at the Jewish General Hospital, will partner with a JGH-MUHC team to bring a standardized Enhanced Recovery after Surgery (ERAS) protocol to cancer patients who have their bladder removed. ERAS has been shown to significantly decrease complications after surgery and reduce the length of stay in hospital. This will include patient counseling, as well as a standardized process with a multidisciplinary team before and after surgery at both MUHC and JGH.

**Dr. Antonio Vigano**, director of the Cancer Rehabilitation Program at the MUHC along with an MUHC-JGH team will complete a feasibility study to develop a care model that incorporates controlled access to medical cannabis at the RCN partner hospitals. In light of the coming legalization of cannabis in 2018, the project team will assess how a comprehensive action plan for oncology patients in the McGill hospitals can be put in place. This would include evaluating eligibility criteria, the symptoms that are to be targeted as well as how best to integrate this model of care into existing operations.

To learn more about the QI² program or to apply for the fall 2017 edition, visit mcgill.ca/rcr-rcn/grants.